



Colleges of Education: A National Portrait

Second Edition

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Executive Summary

Colleges of education are best known for preparing future teachers, which is one of their most essential functions, but they do much more to advance the quality of education in America's schools, colleges, adult education centers, early childhood education programs, nonprofit organizations, and other educational entities. This report attempts to provide a comprehensive picture of colleges of education: the work that they do, the people who do that work, and the individuals they prepare. Because teacher preparation is so important, the full report describes in detail the key trends and challenges in meeting the nation's need for highly skilled teachers. The report also portrays the full spectrum of undergraduate and graduate programs, research, and service that occur within schools, colleges, and departments of education (referred to as *colleges of education* throughout this report).



This second edition primarily includes information from 2018-19, the last complete academic year prior to the coronavirus pandemic. As such, it provides a valuable snapshot of education preparation before the pandemic resulted in unexpected and widespread enrollment declines, budget cuts, and other challenges. It also includes a snapshot of the contributions that community colleges make to the field of educator preparation.

Among the report's key findings are the following:

Size and Scope of Education Programs

- More than 2,300 colleges and universities, or 38% of all postsecondary institutions, awarded degrees and/or certificates in education during 2018-19. These institutions conferred more than 300,000 degrees and certificates in education; almost half of those awards were master's degrees, and almost 30% were bachelor's degrees.
- There are 1,605 colleges of education in the United States, defined as four-year colleges and universities that award degrees and/or certificates in education at the bachelor's level or higher.
- Colleges of education award degrees and certificates in more than 100 specialties; programs preparing students to become teachers and school administrators are the most popular.
- organizations, school districts, and other entities approved by their states to offer alternative teacher preparation programs.
- More than 560,000 students were enrolled in teacher preparation programs in 2018-19. Seventy-seven percent of program completers attended traditional programs run by colleges and universities. Colleges and universities also sponsor 487 alternative programs that accounted for 11% of program completers.
- Of the high-need fields identified by the U.S. Department of Education (bilingual education and English language acquisition, foreign language, math, reading, science, and special education), only special education is among the most popular degree fields.

Functions and Activities of Colleges of Education

Teaching: Undergraduate Programs

- Teacher preparation is the dominant activity at the undergraduate level; 96% of undergraduate education degrees and certificates are in programs that prepare students for teaching.
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- The number of undergraduate education degrees awarded annually peaked at almost 200,000 in the early 1970s and was less than 90,000 in 2018-19. Since 2005, the number of bachelor's degrees conferred in education has dropped while the number of students earning degrees in other large fields has risen.
- One reason for declining participation in undergraduate education programs is expanded opportunities available to women in other fields. In 1970-71, 36% of all bachelor's degrees awarded to women were in education. Since then, as the total number of bachelor's degrees earned by women more than doubled, the number of bachelor's degrees women earned in education dropped by almost half. In 2018-19, only 6% of all bachelor's degrees awarded to women were in education.
- Factors affecting enrollment in teacher preparation programs include the relatively low pay of teachers and concerns about working conditions. In addition, the coronavirus pandemic has led to an overall decline in undergraduate enrollment, which has further contributed to declining participation in educator preparation.
- Most institutions award few undergraduate degrees in education. Only 68 institutions awarded 250 or more education bachelor's degrees in 2018-19; those institutions account for one third of all such degrees. More than 1,100 institutions confer fewer than 100 education bachelor's degrees; 357 of these institutions award 10 or fewer degrees in education, up from 268 institutions in 2015-16. One consequence of declining undergraduate enrollment may be the closure of at least some of these small programs.



Teaching: Graduate Programs

- Master's degrees are the most commonly conferred degree in education. The number of master's degrees in education awarded annually rose from the mid-1980s through 2011, then fell precipitously between 2011 and 2015. It has since held steady at approximately 145,000 degrees. The drop in master's degrees between 2011 and 2015 may be due to changes in school district policies on reimbursing graduate course work and rewarding holders of advanced degrees with higher salaries.
- In 1975, 40% of all master's degrees were in education, making it by far the most popular field. Today, the range of master's degree fields is larger, and education is the second most popular field at 18% of all degrees, following business at 24%.
- The number of doctorates awarded in education has grown steadily, more than doubling since the mid-1990s. Interesting questions for colleges of education to consider are why doctoral programs remain popular when other degree programs have declining participation and whether there are aspects of these programs that are responsible for their continued popularity that could be replicated at the bachelor's and master's degree levels.
- The specialties that graduate students choose are more diverse than at the undergraduate level, with educational leadership and administration particularly popular among those earning doctorates and graduate certificates.

Research

- A robust infrastructure of scholarly organizations, journals, and public and private funders supports education research conducted at colleges of education.

- Despite government and philanthropic support for education research, most individuals earning doctorates in education do so to advance careers in teaching or administration rather than research. The tight academic job market may dissuade students from considering a career in academe.

Service

- The service that faculty perform can take many forms, from providing ongoing professional development to teachers and administrators to creating curricula and instructional materials to consulting with schools regarding the needs of particular student populations. These community engagement and outreach activities are as diverse as the interests of faculty and the needs of partners.
- In addition to working closely with public PK-12 schools, some colleges of education run their own schools. These "laboratory schools" support the preparation of future teachers, educational experimentation, educational research, and professional development.

Leadership and Faculty

- The "average" dean of a college of education is a White woman in her late 50s who has been in her position for 6 years. Deans earn a median annual salary of \$165,000. Assistant and associate deans are even more likely to be female, average a few years younger, and also have been in their positions for an average of 6 years; their median annual salary is \$117,000.
- At each rank, education faculty are far more likely than faculty as a whole to be female. White faculty hold 70% or more of tenured and tenure track positions in education, although there is a higher share of African American faculty in education than in higher education as a whole and lower representation of Asian American faculty.

- The average age of full professors of education is 59, suggesting that many faculty are likely to retire during the next decade. An important question is whether colleges of education will be able to retain tenure-track positions as faculty retire. Tenured and tenure-track faculty earn a median annual salary that is approximately \$15,000 more than those not on the tenure track. In addition, most non-tenure-track faculty are not eligible for benefits, further reducing the cost of these positions.
- At the bachelor's degree level, colleges of education are less diverse than higher education as a whole. Among the fields in which more than 20,000 students earned bachelor's degrees in 2018-19, only agriculture was less diverse.
- Those enrolled in teacher preparation programs are a somewhat more diverse group than education degree recipients. The primary reason for this difference is that alternative programs—although comparatively small—have a high proportion of students of color.

Students

Undergraduates

- Women earn 83% of undergraduate degrees and certificates conferred by colleges of education and make up 77% of those enrolled in teacher preparation programs.
- Despite concerted efforts to recruit diverse students, colleges of education are not nearly as racially and ethnically diverse as the PK-12 schools where they prepare students to work. In 2022, 55% of students in public schools are projected to be non-White, but only 28% of those earning undergraduate degrees and certificates from colleges of education are people of color.
- Students earning bachelor's degrees in education are primarily traditional aged, are financially dependent on their parents, and come from families in which one or both parents attended college. They tend to work part-time while enrolled and attend college full-time.
- Concerns about the academic qualifications of teacher candidates do not appear to be borne out by available data; bachelor's degree students majoring in education have similar academic credentials, in terms of both high school GPA and admission test scores, to the rest of the student population.



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Graduate Students

- Students earning master's degrees and graduate certificates in education are disproportionately White and female. The doctoral level is more diverse due to a greater level of participation by African American students, who earn 18% of education doctorates. In fact, education is one of the least diverse large master's degree fields and one of the most diverse doctoral fields.
- Education doctoral and graduate certificate students are considerably older and more likely to be married and to have children than those earning similar degrees in other fields or than education master's degree students, although 42% of master's degree students have dependents and 41% of those children are aged 4 or younger.
- Education graduate students earn more than their peers in other fields. The gap is largest at the doctoral level, where the median income of education students is \$60,000 greater than the median income of students in other fields. The gap is so large in part because education doctoral students are older, more

likely to be married, and more likely to work full-time than those in other fields.

- Because of their work responsibilities, most education graduate students study part-time.

Contributions of Community Colleges to Educator Preparation

- Community colleges make important contributions to the education profession by preparing a diverse student body to pursue careers in early childhood education and as paraprofessionals in K-12 schools.
- Community colleges also serve as the point of entry to higher education for almost 40% of students who eventually major in education at 4-year institutions.
- In addition to being far more racially and ethnically diverse than their peers at 4-year institutions, community college education students are older and more likely to be financially independent and to have their own families.



Challenges and Impact of Colleges of Education

- Many of the challenges affecting colleges of education that were identified in the first edition of the *National Portrait* remain, and have been heightened due to the coronavirus pandemic. Despite these challenges, colleges of education have been resilient and have persisted in playing a critical role in the nation's education system.
- During the pandemic, Americans gained new appreciation for the contributions that educators make to American society—and for the void that is created when schools are forced to suspend in-person operations. As schools resume full-time in-person classes, it will be up to colleges of education and their allies in PK-12 education to ensure that the public remembers the value of teachers and other education professionals, provides educators with the compensation and respect they deserve, and encourages new generations of Americans to become educators.

